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risk” for repayment if a liability is established based on the State agency’s payment error rate for the subsequent fiscal year; or assert any combination of these options. Once FNS establishes its proposed liability resolution plan, the amount assigned as at-risk is not subject to settlement negotiation between FNS and the State agency and may not be reduced unless an appeal decision revises the total dollar liability. FNS and the State shall settle any waiver amount or reinvestment amount before the end of the fiscal year in which the liability amount is determined unless an administrative appeal relating to the claim is pending. If a State agency appeals its liability determination, if the State agency began required reinvestment activities prior to an appeal determination, and if the liability amount is reduced to \$0 through the appeal, FNS shall pay to the State agency an amount equal to 50 percent of the new investment amount that was included in the liability amount subject to the appeal. If FNS wholly prevails on a State agency’s appeal, FNS will require the State agency to invest all or a portion of the amount designated for reinvestment during the appeal to be reinvested or to be repaid to the Federal government.

[Amdt. 160, 45 FR 15912, Mar. 11, 1980, as amended by Amdt. 260, 49 FR 6311, Feb. 17, 1984; Amdt. 262, 49 FR 50598, Dec. 31, 1984. Redesignated and amended at 52 FR 3410, Feb. 4, 1987; Amdt. 295, 52 FR 29659, Aug. 11, 1987; Amdt. 328, 56 FR 60052, Nov. 27, 1991; Amdt. 325, 57 FR 2828, Jan. 24, 1992; Amdt. 327, 57 FR 44486, Sept. 28, 1992; 57 FR 47163, Oct. 14, 1992; Amdt. 348, 59 FR 34561, July 6, 1994; ; Amdt. 366, 62 FR 29659, June 2, 1997; Amdt. 373, 64 FR 38297, July 16, 1999; 68 FR 59524, Oct. 16, 2003]

§ 275.24 High performance bonuses.

(a) *General rule.* (1) FNS will award bonuses totaling \$48 million for each fiscal year to State agencies that show high or improved performance in accordance with the performance measures under paragraph (b) of this section.

(2) FNS will award the bonuses no later than September 30th of the fiscal year following the performance measurement year.

(3) A State agency is not eligible for a bonus payment in any fiscal year for

which it has a liability amount established as a result of an excessive payment error rate in the same year. If a State is disqualified from receiving a bonus payment under this paragraph (a)(3), and the State is not tied for a bonus, the State with the next best performance will be awarded a bonus payment.

(4) The determination whether, and in what amount, to award a performance bonus payment is not subject to administrative or judicial review.

(5) In determining the amount of the award, FNS will first award a base amount of \$100,000 to each State agency that is an identified winner in each category. Subsequently, FNS will divide the remaining money among the States in each category (see paragraph (b) of this section) in proportion to the size of their caseloads (the average number of households per month for the fiscal year for which performance is measured).

(6) A State cannot be awarded two bonuses in the same category; the relevant categories are payment accuracy (which is outlined in paragraph (b)(1) of this section), negative error rate (which is outlined in paragraph (b)(2) of this section), or program access index (which is outlined in paragraph (b)(3) of this section). If a State is determined to be among the best and the most improved in a category, it will be awarded a bonus only for being the best. The next State in the best category will be awarded a bonus as being among the best States.

(7) Where there is a tie to the fourth decimal point for the categories outlined in paragraphs (b)(1) through (b)(4) of this section, FNS will add the additional State(s) into the category and the money will be divided among all the States in accordance with paragraph (a)(5) of this section.

(b) *Performance measures.* FNS will measure performance by and base awards on the following categories of performance measures:

(1) *Payment accuracy.* FNS will divide \$24 million among the 10 States with the lowest and the most improved combined payment error rates as specified in paragraphs (b)(1)(i) and (b)(1)(ii) of this section.

(i) *Excellence in payment accuracy.* FNS will provide bonuses to the 7 States with the lowest combined payment error rates based on the validated quality control payment error rates for the performance measurement year as determined in accordance with this part.

(ii) *Most improved in payment accuracy.* FNS will provide bonuses to the 3 States with the largest percentage point decrease in their combined payment error rates based on the comparison of the validated quality control payment error rates for the performance measurement year and the previous fiscal year, as determined in accordance with this part.

(2) *Negative error rate.* FNS will divide \$6 million among the 6 States with the lowest and the most improved negative error rates as specified in paragraphs (b)(2)(i) and (b)(2)(ii) of this section.

(i) *Lowest negative error rate.* FNS will provide bonuses to the 4 States with the lowest negative error rates based on the validated quality control negative error rates for the performance year as determined in accordance with this part.

(ii) *Most improved negative error rate.* FNS will provide bonuses to the 2 States with the largest percentage point decrease in their negative error rates, based on the comparison of the performance measurement year's validated quality control negative error rates with those of the previous fiscal year, as determined in accordance with this part. A State agency is not eligible for a bonus under this criterion if the State's negative error rate for the fiscal year is more than 50 percent above the national average.

(3) *Program access index (PAI).* FNS will divide \$12 million among the 8 States with the highest and the most improved level of participation as specified in paragraphs (b)(3)(i) through (b)(3)(iii) of this section. The PAI is the ratio of participants to persons with incomes below 125 percent of poverty, as calculated in accordance with paragraph (b)(3)(iii) of this section (the PAI was formerly known as the participant access rate (PAR)).

(i) *High program access index.* FNS will provide bonuses to the 4 States with the highest PAI as determined in

accordance with paragraph (b)(3)(iii) of this section.

(ii) *Most improved program access index.* FNS will provide bonuses to the 4 States with the most improved PAI as determined in accordance with paragraph (b)(3)(iii) of this section.

(iii) *Data.* For the number of participants (numerator), FNS will use the administrative annual counts of participants minus new participants certified under special disaster program rules by State averaged over the calendar year. For the number of people below 125 percent of poverty (denominator), FNS will use the Census Bureau's March Supplement to the Current Population Survey's (CPS) count of people below 125 percent of poverty for the same calendar year. FNS will reduce the count in each State where a Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) program is operated by the administrative counts of the number of individuals who participate in this program averaged over the calendar year. FNS will reduce the count in California by the Census Bureau's percentage of people below 125% of poverty in California who received Supplemental Security Income in the previous year. FNS reserves the right to use data from the American Community Survey (ACS) in lieu of the CPS, and to use the count of people below 130 percent of poverty, should these data become available in a timely fashion and prove more accurate. Such a substitution would apply to all States.

(4) *Application processing timeliness.* FNS will divide \$6 million among the 6 States with the highest percentage of timely processed applications.

(i) *Data.* FNS will use quality control data to determine each State's rate of application processing timeliness.

(ii) *Timely processed applications.* A timely processed application is one that provides an eligible applicant the "opportunity to participate" as defined in § 274.2 of this chapter, within thirty days for normal processing or 7 days for expedited processing. New applications that are processed outside of this standard are untimely for this measure, except for applications that are properly pending in accordance with § 273.2(h)(2) of this chapter because verification is incomplete and the

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State agency has taken all the actions described in § 273.2(h)(1)(i)(C) of this chapter. Such applications will not be included in this measure. Applications that are denied will not be included in this measure.

(iii) *Evaluation of applications.* Only applications that were filed on or after the beginning of the performance measurement (fiscal) year will be evaluated under this measure.

[70 FR 6322, Feb. 7, 2005]

PART 276—STATE AGENCY LIABILITIES AND FEDERAL SANCTIONS

Sec.

276.1 Responsibilities and rights.

276.2 State agency liabilities.

276.3 Negligence or fraud.

276.4 Suspension/disallowance of administrative funds.

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AUTHORITY: 7 U.S.C. 2011–2036.

EDITORIAL NOTE: OMB control numbers relating to this part 276 are contained in § 271.8.

§ 276.1 Responsibilities and rights.

(a) *Responsibilities.* (1) State agencies shall be responsible for establishing and maintaining secure control over coupons and cash for which the regulations designate them accountable. Except as otherwise provided in these regulations, any shortages or losses of coupons and cash shall strictly be a State agency liability and the State agency shall pay to FNS, upon demand, the amount of the lost or stolen coupons or cash, regardless of the circumstances.

(2) State agencies shall be responsible for preventing losses or shortages of Federal funds in the issuance of benefits to households participating in the Program. FNS shall strictly hold State agencies liable for all losses, thefts and unaccounted shortages that occur during issuance, unless otherwise specified. Issuance functions begin with the State agency's creation of a record-for-issuance to generate each month's issuances from the master issuance file. Shortages or losses which result from any functions that occur prior to the creation of the record-for-issuance are subject to either paragraph (a)(3) of

this section or subpart C—Quality Control (QC) Reviews, of part 275—Performance Reporting System.

(3) State agencies shall be responsible for preventing losses of Federal funds in the certification of households for participation in the Program. If FNS makes a determination that there has been negligence or fraud on the part of a State agency in the certification of households for participation in the Program, FNS is authorized to bill the State agency for an amount equal to the amount of coupons issued as a result of the negligence or fraud.

(4) State agencies shall be responsible for efficiently and effectively administering the Program by complying with the provisions of the Act, the regulations issued pursuant to the Act, and the FNS-approved State Plan of Operation. A determination by FNS that a State agency has failed to comply with any of these provisions may result in FNS seeking injunctive relief to compel compliance and/or a suspension or disallowance of the Federal share of the State agency's administrative funds. FNS has the discretion to determine in each instance of non-compliance, whether to seek injunctive relief or to suspend or disallow administrative funds. FNS may seek injunctive relief *and* suspend or disallow funds simultaneously or in sequence.

(b) *Rights.* State agencies may appeal all claims brought against them by FNS and shall be afforded an administrative review by a designee of the Secretary as provided in § 276.7. State agencies may seek judicial review of any final administrative determination made by the Secretary's designee, as provided in § 276.7(j).

[54 FR 7016, Feb. 15, 1989]

§ 276.2 State agency liabilities.

(a) *General provisions.* Notwithstanding any other provision of this subchapter, State agencies shall be responsible to FNS for any financial losses involved in the acceptance, storage and issuance of coupons. All coupon issuance shall be documented, and the State agency shall make available to the Department all primary documentation (or secondary, if the primary has been inadvertently destroyed) when required to do so. State